

Item 3.6

Improving Safety for People Riding and Walking

File No: S051491

Minute by the Lord Mayor

To Council:

The City of Sydney's commitment to creating a city for walking and cycling is a key part of our work to improve liveability and to address the climate emergency. It reduces emissions by providing clean and efficient alternatives to driving. Making it easier for people to walk and ride is also good for business and our community's health.

The City has delivered 25 kilometres of safe, separated cycleways, 66 kilometres of shared paths and 45 kilometres of other cycling infrastructure. Bike trips in our local area have more than doubled since 2010, and we estimate that more than 10,000 people now ride to work on weekdays. That is the equivalent of 10 full trains or 166 full buses.

Share bikes are a useful and sustainable means of transport for many people. Between January and June 2024, over 840,000 trips were made by share bike in the City, which equates to over 160,000 trips per month.

However, the number of share bikes in our area has drastically increased from 328 in January 2022 to 4,500 in May 2024, creating unacceptable clutter, and safety and access issues for people on footpaths and other public places.

Share bikes

The City has no direct involvement in the provision, regulation, or management of bike share schemes. They don't require permission to operate.

In 2017, before any bike share companies started operating in Sydney, I wrote to the then NSW Government asking them to regulate bike share operations. I also expressed concerns about how abandoned bikes would be dealt with.

In the absence of NSW Government action at that time, the City along with six other Sydney councils developed guidelines that set expectations for bike share operators. Unfortunately, despite our best efforts, there is no statutory requirement or incentives for bike share companies to comply.

In November 2022, the former NSW Government introduced the Public Spaces (Unattended Property) Act 2021, which makes operators responsible for removing share bikes quickly from public land if they are poorly parked, interfering with public amenity, or causing an obstruction or safety risk.

There are significant challenges for councils applying the legislation to share bikes. It does not provide any investigative powers and seven days is too long to wait before Council's Rangers can move problematic bikes. Further, the burden is placed on councils to store impounded bikes before they can be claimed or disposed of.

Despite the City's limited powers, we asked bike share operators in our area to implement designated bike parking areas through their apps to promote responsible parking. This means share bike users will only be able to finish their trip and stop the clock running on payment once they place the bike in the allocated area. They are charged a penalty if they fail to comply (e.g. capped at \$25 for Lime bike).

The City initiated trials in Pymont, Ultimo and Circular Quay allocating 60 dedicated bike parking areas on footpaths or public domain areas across these suburbs where there is sufficient space and strong demand from operators and riders for share bikes. Our records for the Pymont trial show that the percentage of share bikes with helmets has increased from 33 per cent to 61 per cent. Further, 77 per cent of share bikes are now parked within one metre of a designated parking area, which helps to contain the issues.

A second trial of 50 dedicated spaces is being established in Forest Lodge and Chippendale and will be operational by July 2024.

In March, I wrote to the Ministers for Roads, Transport and the Police, asking the NSW Government for regulation of share bike companies and to allow bike parking on the road at certain intersections where it does not pose a risk to safety, so we can free up more space on our footpaths. I have also asked Police to crack down on e-bikes that have been illegally modified to allow the motor assistance to exceed 25km/h.

The Minister for Police responded saying she has referred my concerns to the relevant Command so that police can monitor and address the issues.

Earlier this month, I also met with the Minister for Roads who acknowledged our concerns and advised that Transport for NSW is currently developing options for regulating share bikes and will be consulting on these very soon. At the same time, I note that an NSW Parliamentary Inquiry has been established into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options, which I welcome.

Before allocating any more resources to progressing additional designated bike parking trials in other areas of the City, we will wait until the NSW Government and the Parliamentary Inquiry engages with Councils and the community and report their findings.

The City's efforts to influence operator behaviour cannot address the causes of the issue, so NSW Government regulation is urgently required. As a priority, the NSW Government must limit the number of share bike operators and the number of share bikes available for use in our area.

Educating riders

We are aware that many of the people riding on footpaths - often at speed, and conflicting with people walking - are working as food delivery riders or use share bikes. The community increasingly demands and relies on deliveries by bicycle, and people working as delivery riders have the right to safe working conditions. People often ride on footpaths as they feel it is safest for them.

The City is investing over \$105 million over the next ten years to complete a safe and connected bike network, which will help get bikes off the footpath and make walking more pleasant. It will take pressure off roads and public transport by providing a viable alternative to cars for making short trips.

City staff run on-the-ground education programs where they speak to riders on popular commuting routes throughout the City at least twice a week and run regular courses to teach people to ride safely.

We are spending an additional \$120,000 in the 2024/25 financial year to expand our education programs so that our staff can speak to more riders across more areas, especially food delivery riders in high activity areas. We will also refresh our shared path signage so it is clear who can legally use our footpaths and shareways to encourage more courteous behaviour.

The City also spends over \$28 million each year to make walking easier and safer by improving pedestrian connections, widening and upgrading footpaths, and installing lighting and ramps. The City's Walking Strategy and Action Plan – Continuing the Vision outlines how we will continue and approve upon that work over the next ten years.

Recommendation

It is resolved that:

(A) Council note:

- (i) creating a City for walking and cycling improves liveability, reduces emissions and provides cheaper and healthier alternatives to driving;
- (ii) the number of share bikes in our area has drastically increased from 328 in January 2022 to 4,500 in May 2024 creating unacceptable clutter and safety and access issues for people on footpaths and other public places;
- (iii) since 2017, the City of Sydney and the Lord Mayor have been advocating to the NSW Government for regulation of share bike schemes including letters to and meetings with Transport for NSW and relevant Ministers;
- (iv) the Public Spaces (Unattended Property) Act 2021 is not an effective way for councils to manage issues with share bikes;
- (v) Transport for NSW is developing options for regulating share bikes and will be consulting on them soon;
- (vi) on 6 June 2024, a NSW Parliamentary Inquiry was established into the use of e-scooters, e-bikes and related mobility options;
- (vii) the City of Sydney will wait until the NSW Government and the Parliamentary Inquiry engages with councils and the community and report their findings before progressing additional designated bike parking trials across our Local Government Area; and
- (viii) the City of Sydney is allocating significant funding in the Long Term Financial Plan 2024/25 to 2033/34 to make walking safer and easier, to complete a safe and connected bike network and to expand our rider education programs to improve safety for people riding and walking; and

- (B) the Chief Executive Officer be requested to participate in upcoming consultation processes by Transport for NSW and in relation to the NSW Parliamentary Inquiry calling for:
- (i) a cap on the number of share bike operators in our Local Government Area as well as the number of share bikes available for use and setting expectations for equipment quality and safety, and circular economy obligations; and
 - (ii) changes to relevant NSW Roads Rules to enable councils to designate bike share parking areas on the road in locations where it is safe, such as within 'No stopping' areas at the departure side of some intersections.

COUNCILLOR CLOVER MOORE AO

Lord Mayor